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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: WB/G SITREP: FATAH ACTIVISTS CLASH WITH PA
SECURITY IN RAMALLAH; MASS DEMONSTRATIONS IN GAZA -- MAY
24, 2005 (1300 HOURS LOCAL)

This is a joint ConGen Jerusalem/Embassy Tel Aviv cable.

1. (SBU) Summary: Approximately 300 Fatah activists the evening of May 23 attempted to enter the Muqata'a in Ramallah in order to visit former Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Arafat's gravesite. Clashes erupted as PA security forces blocked their entrance into the compound. The Fatah activists responded by throwing stones at PA security, which in turn responded with automatic gunfire that resulted in serious wounds to one demonstrator. An IED exploded next to an IDF on patrol west of Hebron May 23, and the IDF arrested a Palestinian teenager carrying an explosive belt near the Bethlehem District Coordination office the same day. Gaza was largely quiet on the security front, although tens of thousands of Hamas supporters demonstrated throughout the strip to protest the PA court decision to re-run elections in Rafah, Bayt Lahiya, and al-Bureij. End Summary.

West Bank

2. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Death: Nil.

-- Clashes/injury: Approximately 300 Fatah activists the evening of May 23 attempted to enter the Muqata'a in Ramallah in order to visit former Palestinian Authority (PA) Chairman Arafat's gravesite. Clashes erupted as PA security forces blocked their entrance into the compound. The Fatah activists responded by throwing stones at PA security, which in turn responded with automatic gunfire that resulted in serious wounds to one demonstrator.

-- Explosion: A roadside bomb on May 23 exploded next to an IDF jeep on patrol near Dura village, west of Hebron. There were no injuries reported from this incident, but the IDF jeep was damaged in the attack.

3. (SBU) ARRESTS/SECURITY:

-- Arrest: The IDF on May 23 arrested a Palestinian teenager carrying an explosive belt near the Bethlehem District Coordination office.

-- East Jerusalem arrests: Israeli police on May 23 arrested eight Palestinians from the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Isawiya on suspicion of carrying out, as members of the PFLP, a series of firebomb and stoning attacks against Israeli vehicles.

-- Human shield allegation: According to Palestinian witnesses and the Israeli daily Ha'aretz IDF soldiers used a Palestinian youth from Dura village, west of Hebron, as a human shield during clashes with Palestinians in the village last week. According to the Ha'aretz report, the IDF has denied the allegation.

4. (SBU) POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

-- Fourteen Palestinian prisoners incarcerated in Jericho on May 23 suspended their hunger strike following a visit from members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). The PLC has reportedly agreed to convene a session of the council to address the prisoners, grievances, namely their continued detention without charges or trial.

Gaza

5. (SBU) ATTACKS:

-- Deaths: Nil.

-- Injuries: UNRWA reported that three students of al-Aqsa

University were injured May 23 when a dispute between Fatah and Hamas supporters broke out over the decision to postpone the student council elections at the university.

-- Mortars/Rockets: The IDF reported that Palestinian militants fired one mortar shell at an IDF outpost west of Khan Yunis in the early morning hours May 24. UNRWA reported that responsibility for mortars fired May 23 had been jointly claimed by PFLP, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades and the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC)

-- Shootings: The IDF reported two exchanges of fire May 23, one near Rafiah Yam and the other near Rafah.

16. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS:

-- Route Four (Salahadeen Road), the main north-south traffic artery, was open May 24, with a major detour at Netzarim Junction.

-- Erez Crossing was open May 23, and 4,773 laborers and 254 merchants crossed into Israel.

-- The Erez Industrial Zone was open May 23, and 615 laborers entered Israel.

-- Sufa Crossing was closed for Palestinian laborers May 24, but was open for the import of aggregates used in construction.

-- Karni Terminal was open May 24.

-- Rafah Terminal was open for arrivals and departures May 24.

-- Tel al-Sultan checkpoint was closed May 24. Toufah checkpoint was open for residents of al-Mowassi, except males aged 16-30.

17. (SBU) POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

-- UNRWA and Palestinian sources reported that some 50,000 Hamas supporters demonstrated in Gaza City the evening of May 23 to protest the court decision to re-run elections in parts of Bayt Lahiya, Rafah, and al-Bureij. Another 10,000 Hamas supporters demonstrated in Rafah, 5,000-6,000 demonstrated in al-Bureij, and 4,000-5,000 demonstrated in Nuseirat, according to UNRWA.

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